

Design released for new half dollar

By Roger Boye

After weeks of seeming delay, Treasury Department chiefs have released sketches of a new commemorative half dollar to be issued in silver later this year.

The coin—Uncle Sam's first commemorative half since 1954—marks George Washington's 250th birthday by depicting a middle-aged Washington astride a horse. The design is unlike any used before on U.S. coinage.

Government machinery will produce as many as 10 million specimens, putting more than a third of an ounce of silver in each. The coins will be identical in size and metal composition to half dollars made for circulation before 1965, the so-called 90 percent silver pieces.

Artist Elizabeth Jones, who designed both sides of the coin, said she was inspired by Rembrandt Peale's 1824 painting of Washington which hangs today in a Philadelphia gallery. Jones became the chief sculptor-engraver of the

United States last year, the first woman to hold the job.

Her unusual but striking depiction is not surprising. Late last year, she told interviewers that she wanted to create something both traditional and new, a design that would look different from what is on the 25-cent piece.

In addition to the quarter made since 1932, images of Washington have appeared on a 1900 silver dollar and a 1926 commemorative half dollar marking the 150th anniversary of American independence. Of course, many medals and tokens also have carried Washington portraits.

The tails side of the coin will show the eastern facade of Washington's home, Mt. Vernon, as well as an eagle bearing a banner reading "E Pluribus Unum" [from many, one]. The bird's pose is similar to the stance of an eagle depicted on some U.S. coins minted in the early 1800s.

Uncle Sam will sell both proof and uncirculated specimens to collectors for manufacturing costs plus 20 percent, at least \$10 per coin. As specified in legislation passed last year, each piece will be "legal tender" for 50 cents.

I'll report ordering details as soon as they are announced, most likely in early summer. If the halves are sold widely, as expected, several years may pass before the coins increase in value on the collector market.